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CONDITION OF THE INDIAN TRIBES.



REPORT

OF THE

JOINT SPECIAL COMMITTEE,

APPOINTED UNDER

JOINT RESOLUTION OF MARCH 3, 1865.

WITH

AN APPENDIX.

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

JANUARY 26, 1867.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. DOOLITTLE submitted the following

REPORT.

The Joint Special Committee of the two Houses of Congress, appointed under the joint resolution of March 3, 1865, directing an inquiry into the condition of the Indian tribes and their treatment by the civil and military authorities of the United States, submit the following report, with an appendix accompanying the same :

At its meeting on the 9th of March the following subdivision of labor was made : To Messrs. Doolittle, Foster, and Ross was assigned the duty of inquiring into Indian affairs in the State of Kansas, the Indian Territory, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah.

To Messrs. Nesmith and Higby the same duty was assigned in the States of California, Oregon, and Nevada, and in the Territories of Washington, Idaho, and Montana.

To Messrs. Windom and Hubbard the same duty was assigned in the State of Minnesota and in the Territories of Nebraska, Dakota, and upper Montana. The result of their inquiries is to be found in the appendix accompanying this report.

The work was immense, covering a continent. While they have gathered a vast amount of testimony and important information bearing upon our Indian affairs, they are still conscious that their explorations have been imperfect.

As it was found impossible for the members of the committee in person to take the testimony or from personal observations to learn all that they deemed necessary to form a correct judgment of the true condition of the Indian tribes, they deemed it wise, by a circular letter addressed to officers of the regular army, experienced Indian agents and superintendents, and to other persons of great knowledge in Indian affairs, to obtain from them a statement of the result of their experience and information ; which, with the testimony taken by the various members of the sub-committees, is also to be found in the appendix.

The committee have arrived at the following conclusions :

First. The Indians everywhere, with the exception of the tribes within the Indian Territory, are rapidly decreasing in numbers from various causes : By disease ; by intemperance ; by wars, among themselves and with the whites ; by the steady and resistless emigration of white men into the territories of the west, which, confining the Indians to still narrower limits, destroys that game which, in their normal state, constitutes their principal means of subsistence ; and by the irrepressible conflict between a superior and an inferior race when brought in presence of each other. Upon this subject all the testimony agrees.

In answer to the question, whether the Indians "are increasing or decreasing in numbers, and from what causes," Major General Pope says :

"They are rapidly decreasing in numbers from various causes : By disease ; by wars ; by cruel treatment on the part of the whites—both by irresponsible

persons and by government officials; by unwise policy of the government, by inhumane and dishonest administration of that policy; and by steady and resistless encroachments of the white emigration toward the west, which every day confining the Indians to narrower limits, and driving off or killing the game, their only means of subsistence.”—(See appendix, page 425.)

To the same question, General John T. Sprague gives the following answer:

“The Indians are decreasing in numbers, caused by their proximity to the white man. So soon as Indians adopt the habits of white men they begin to decrease, aggravated by imbibing all the vices and none of their virtues. Other causes exist, too numerous to be detailed in this paper.”—(Appendix, 228.)

The following is the answer of General Carleton to the same question:

“As a general rule, the Indians alluded to are decreasing very rapidly in numbers, in my opinion. The causes for this have been many, and may be summed up as follows:

1st. Wars with our pioneers and our armed forces; change of climate and country among those who have been moved from east of the Mississippi to the far west.

2d. Intemperance, and the exposure consequent thereon.

3d. Venereal diseases, which they are unable, from the lack of medicines and skill, to eradicate from their systems, and which, among Indians who live nearest the whites, is generally diffused either in scrofula or some other form of it taint.

4th. Small-pox, measles, and cholera—diseases unknown to them in the early days of the country.

5th. The causes which the Almighty originates, when in their appointed time He wills that one race of men—as in races of lower animals—shall disappear off the face of the earth and give place to another race, and so on, in the great cycle traced out by Himself, which may be seen, but has reasons too deep to be fathomed by us. The races of the mammoths and mastodons, and the great sloths, came and passed away: the red man of America is passing away!” (Appendix, 432–3.)

General Wright gives his testimony to the same point as follows:

“The Indian tribes are rapidly decreasing in numbers, especially west of the Rocky mountains, caused in some measure by the wars waged against them and more particularly by the encroachments of the whites upon their hunting grounds and fisheries and other means of subsistence, and by the readiness with which they adopt the vices of the whites rather than their virtues; hence their numbers are rapidly diminished by disease and death.”—(Appendix, 440.)

These officers have had large experience in Indian affairs, and they are supported by the concurrent testimony of many other of the most experienced officers and civilians, to be found at length in the Appendix.

The tribes in the Indian Territory were most happily exempted from this constant tendency to decay up to the commencement of the late civil war. Until they became involved in that they were actually advancing in population, education, civilization, and agricultural wealth.

Their exceptional condition may be attributed to the fact that, from their earliest history these tribes had, to a considerable extent, cultivated the soil and kept herds of cattle and horses; that they were located in a most fertile territory and withdrawn from the neighborhood and influence of white settlements and to the legitimate influence of education and Christianity among them.

The war has made a terrible diminution of their number, and brought disease and demoralization in its train. A full account of the condition of the Cherokees will be found in the reply of the Hon. J. Harlan, agent of the Cherokees (See Appendix, pages 441–50.) The recent treaties with the tribes in the

Indian territory, and the reports of their improved condition since the pacification, give strong hopes that their former prosperity will return.

The committee determined, if possible, to ascertain the real cause of the destruction of the tribes, and proposed to the officers above named, and to many others, the following most important inquiry bearing upon that subject, viz :

“What diseases are most common and most fatal among them, and from what causes?”

To this General Sprague answers :

“The children die rapidly and suddenly from dysentery and measles, and from neglect and exposure to the weather. The adults die from fevers, small-pox, drunkenness, and diseases engendered from sexual intercourse. These diseases are among the men and women in the most malignant form, as the Indian doctors are unable to manage them. Indulgence in liquor, exposure, and the absence of remedies aggravate the disease. In this, striking at the very basis of procreation, is to be found the active cause of the destruction of the Indian race.”

General Pope is of opinion that “venereal diseases, particularly secondary syphilis, is the most common and destructive. It is to be doubted whether one Indian, man or woman, in five, is free from this disease or its effects.”

Without quoting from others, it will be found, by the united testimony of all, that this disease, more than all other diseases, and perhaps more than all other causes, is the active agent of the destruction of the Indian race. Add to this intemperance, exposure, the want of sufficient food and clothing, wars among themselves and wars with the whites, and we are at no loss to account for the utter extinction of many of the most powerful tribes, and the ultimate disappearance of nearly all upon this continent. It is a sad but faithful picture.

INDIAN WARS WITH THE WHITES.

Second. The committee are of opinion that in a large majority of cases Indian wars are to be traced to the aggressions of lawless white men, always to be found upon the frontier, or boundary line between savage and civilized life. Such is the statement of the most experienced officers of the army, and of all those who have been long conversant with Indian affairs.

Colonel Bent, who has lived upon the Upper Arkansas, near Bent's fort, for thirty-six years, states that in nearly every instance difficulties between Indians and the whites arose from aggressions on the Indians by the whites. The war with the Sioux, commencing in 1854, the war with the Arrapahoes and Cheyennes in 1865, are traced by him directly to those aggressions. (Appendix, page 93.)

Colonel Kit Carson, who has lived upon the plains and in the mountains since 1826, and has been all that time well acquainted with the Indian tribes in peace and in war, confirms this statement. He says, “as a general thing the difficulties arise from aggressions on the part of the whites.” “The whites are always cursing the Indians, and are not willing to do them justice.” (Appendix, page 94.)

From whatever cause wars may be brought on, either between different Indian tribes or between the Indians and the whites, they are very destructive, not only of the lives of the warriors engaged in it, but of the women and children also, often becoming a war of extermination. Such is the rule of savage warfare, and it is difficult if not impossible to restrain white men, especially white men upon the frontiers, from adopting the same mode of warfare against the Indians. The indiscriminate slaughter of men, women, and children has frequently occurred in the history of Indian wars. But the fact which gives such terrible force to the condemnation of the wholesale massacre of Arrapahoes and

Cheyennes, by the Colorado troops under Colonel Chivington, near Fort Lyon, was, that those Indians were there encamped under the direction of our own officers, and believed themselves to be under the protection of our flag. A full account of this bloody affair will be found also in the appendix. To the honor of the government it may be said that a just atonement for this violation of its faith was sought to be made in the late treaty with these tribes.

Third. Another potent cause of their decay is to be found in the loss of their hunting grounds and in the destruction of that game upon which the Indian subsists. This cause, always powerful, has of late greatly increased. Until the white settlements crossed the Mississippi, the Indians could still find hunting grounds without limit and game, especially the buffalo, in great abundance upon the western plains.

But the discovery of gold and silver in California, and in all the mountain territories, poured a flood of hardy and adventurous miners across those plains, and into all the valleys and gorges of the mountains from the east.

Two lines of railroad are rapidly crossing the plains, one by the valley of the Platte, and the other by the Smoky Hill. They will soon reach the Rocky mountains, crossing the centre of the great buffalo range in two lines from east to west. It is to be doubted if the buffalo in his migrations will many times cross a railroad where trains are passing and repassing, and with the disappearance of the buffalo from this immense region, all the powerful tribes of the plains will inevitably disappear, and remain north of the Platte or south of the Arkansas. Another route further north, from Minnesota by the Upper Missouri, and one further south, from Arkansas by the Canadian, are projected, and will soon be pressed forward. These will drive the last vestige of the buffalo from all the region east of the Rocky mountains, and put an end to the wild man's means of life.

On the other hand, the emigration from California and Oregon into the Territories from the west is filling every valley and gorge of the mountains with the most energetic and fearless men in the world. In those wild regions, where no civil law has ever been administered, and where our military forces have scarcely penetrated, these adventurers are practically without any law, except such as they impose upon themselves, viz: the law of necessity and of self-defence.

Even after territorial governments are established over them in form by Congress, the population is so sparse and the administration of the civil law so feeble that the people are practically without any law but their own will. In their eager search for gold or fertile tracts of land, the boundaries of Indian reservations are wholly disregarded; conflicts ensue; exterminating wars follow, in which the Indian is, of course, at the last, overwhelmed if not destroyed.

THE INDIAN BUREAU.

Fourth. The question whether the Indian bureau should be placed under the War Department or retained in the Department of the Interior is one of considerable importance, and both sides have very warm advocates. Military men generally, unite in recommending that change to be made, while civilians, teachers, missionaries, agents and superintendents, and those not in the regular army generally oppose it. The arguments and objections urged by each are not without force.

The argument in favor of it is that in case of hostilities the military forces must assume control of our relations to the hostile tribes, and therefore it is better for the War Department to have the entire control, both in peace and in war; secondly, that the annuity goods and clothing, paid to Indians under treaty stipulations, will be more faithfully and honestly made by officers of the regular army, who hold their places for life, and are subject to military trials for

up. A narrow strip has been cleared along the bay, where they have about fifty small board and frame houses erected. They also have a few potatoes planted and garden vegetables, which gave but small promise of producing much. I saw nothing being done worthy of being called farming. The little property possessed by these people consists of their canoes, nets, and other fishing gear, with which they are generally enabled to supply their daily wants of food, beyond which they seem to give themselves no especial trouble or care. Here was the only place upon the sound where I witnessed any attempts being made to educate Indian children. The Rev. C. C. Chirouse, a Catholic priest, having some time since established himself here as a teacher, has succeeded in collecting from thirty to forty Indian boys under his care, and by a system of manual labor is attempting to make them support themselves while obtaining an education. His efforts are not confined to the school-room, but he accompanies his pupils in their out-door labors and gives them all needful instruction. The boys under the reverend father's care, and by his aid, have succeeded in clearing up a sufficiently large piece of heavily timbered land for a garden, from which they draw a small supply of vegetables; the remainder of their living is obtained by catching fish in the neighboring waters. The boys are kept entirely separate from their parents, which is indispensable for their proper culture; they are mostly dependent upon the charity of the whites for their clothing. It is a matter of regret that the worthy father is compelled to pursue his benevolent and Christian labors under so many disadvantages, and some further provision should be made to aid him in feeding and clothing the pupils, who seem so anxious to avail themselves of his instructions. In visiting their school-room I was struck with their cleanliness and good manners, as well as with the progress they had made in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Herewith I submit two communications addressed to me by the pupils themselves, and written in a fair and legible hand; they are marked, respectively, C and D.

Lummi reservation is situated near the head of Bellingham bay. Owing to the brief period of my stay, and the stage of the tide, it was inconvenient to visit the village, but from what I saw of the people they appear much of the same character as those at Tulalip. Their agent informed me that the reservation is better adapted to the wants of the Indians than the latter-named point, and that they had made considerable progress in agriculture.

Other points were visited bordering on the sound where Indians occasionally congregate in great numbers for the purpose of taking fish, but as their general features are the same, and as there was but little improvement worthy of note at any of them, they will not require special mention.

Shokomish reservation is situated near the southern end of an arm of Puget sound, known as Hood's canal, which extends southward about one hundred miles from the straits of Juan de Fuca. The Indians who belong to this reservation are the Shokomish and Skallams, and two remnants of other tribes, parties to the treaty of Point No-Point. They are variously estimated at from twelve hundred to four thousand souls; indeed, I do not believe their actual number ever was or ever will be known. I saw but very few of them upon the reservation, but learned that they were absent gathering berries, catching fish, prostituting their women, gambling, and getting drunk, the latter of which appears to be their favorite occupation. Special Agent Knox, who is in charge of them, told me that there were twelve hundred of them came to receive their annuities in November, 1863. Superintendent Waterman estimates them at a much greater number. This reservation appears to be well enough adapted to their wants as a home. But little, however, has been done upon it in the way of improvement. The fish and game, both of which are abundant in the neighborhood, are nearly equally as abundant upon all other portions of the sound; and as these people manifest no disposition to labor, there appears to be no inducement for them to remain at the home to which they have been assigned, consequently they are scattered all along the western shore of Hood's canal and the straits of Juan de Fuca nearly to Cape Flattery, a distance of about one hundred and fifty miles. But little control is exercised over them, and with the means at present at the disposal of the superintendent I am unable to perceive how he is to exercise more, as he is without means to subsist them upon their reservation, and as they are mostly lazy, drunken, dissolute vagabonds, who can neither be persuaded nor compelled to labor. They are brought in contact with the white population at all of the villages and lumber camps along the western portion of the sound, and rapidly falling victims to venereal diseases and noxious whiskey which they can but too readily obtain. The few of them who reside upon the reservation, with a white farmer to assist them, have only about ten acres of ground in cultivation. The annuities and other appropriations are too limited to enable the superintendent to collect and subsist such a demoralized and drunken herd of savages while the experiment of their reformation is being attempted. It is not certain that any amount of means would enable the department to improve the condition of these people. Possibly a few of them may be reclaimed and induced to cultivate the soil. I look, however, upon the great majority of them as doomed to a speedy extinction as the result of indolence, loathsome diseases, and bad whiskey.